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ABSTRACT

This study examined the feedback choices made by 12 professors which they executed in their freshman/sophomore level speech communication performance-based courses. Each instructor tape recorded and coded two 10-minute feedback sessions. Each teacher also responded in free writing form about self-correcting perceptions subsequent to the coding of these taped sessions. Results indicated that there were no significant discrepancies between feedback perceptions between the novice and the seasoned instructors. The public speaking teachers perceived greater direct influence feedback than those teaching other areas. The oral interpretation teachers perceived greater indirect influence feedback. Two of the public speaking teachers commented on their excessive use of direct influence. Two of the voice and diction instructors desired to move toward greater direct feedback. Each teacher discussed, or at least referred to, the importance of feedback in creating the appropriate climate and in encouraging students to develop and progress in their speech performances. (MG)

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# "Feedback: Instructional Decisions to be made in Performance Courses."

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## Introduction

Hearing students complain about that instructor who "counts off" for not gesturing at the proper time, or the teacher who "nails you" for not participating enough in your designated "group" are hardly uncommon grievances. As a college speech teacher of fourteen years, this instructor listens to those type of comments now with a more curious ear. On one hand those seemingly superficial remarks reflect a somewhat non-intellectual view of our discipline. On the other hand, those remarks seem to showcase the sensitivity of students over teacher initiated feedback. Feedback again? Have we not had enough talk about this basic communication principle? Perhaps we have. But feedback is, as our discipline knows, essential in both content and practice. We cannot forget the incredible implications of feedback in our daily pedagogical excursions , as well as its direct relationship to student learning and overall development.

Though feedback is essential in teacher performance, it becomes critical for student development in the performance course. A students performance is, to a great extent, predicated on the thoughtful, supportive, and constructive stimuli that we offer our students. Let us not forget that though feedback is inevitable, there is a difference between feedback and constructive feedback. For us, constructive feedback, defined by this teacher as the kind which enables a student to modify his or her behavior for the better is the bedrock of teaching for the instructor in the speech communication performance course. This teacher's concern over the feedback choices we make and the subsequent student learning manifesting from those choices served as a catalyst for this study.

## Outline of Study

Twelve speech communication professors from various colleges and universities, were asked to monitor the type of feedback decisions they executed in their freshman/sophomore level speech communication-performance based courses. Six instructors were novice teachers (defined by this investigator as having three or fewer years of full-time college teaching experience), and six instructors were seasoned teachers (defined by this investigator as having four or more years of full time college teaching experience). No teacher in the study had fewer than two years or more than six. Of the twelve faculty members, four monitored their public speaking courses, three monitored their courses in voice and diction, two monitored their courses in oral interpretation, two monitored their courses in small group communication, and one instructor monitored his course in speech education. Each teacher was responsible for only one class.

Each instructor was asked to tape record his/her class twice to minimize learner reticence or teacher "talk" trepidation. Only feedback sessions were taped; not student performances. Teachers were asked to tape only a ten minute period. As a result, each teacher coded two ten minute sessions. Each teacher also responded, in free writing form about their self-correcting perceptions subsequent to the coding.

## Assessment

Although there are several methods by which teachers can evaluate their feedback this investigator opted for the commonly used Flanders Interaction Analysis Categories (FIAC), because it is relatively easy to code and enables an instructor to assess his/her overall classroom climate as well as general teaching style.

The FIAC is fragmented into two categories: (1) Teacher-Talk-indirect influence; and (2) Teacher-Talk-direct influence. Indirect influence consists of feedback designed to solicit the opinions or ideas of students, applying or enlarging on those opinions or ideas, praising or encouraging the participation of learners, or classifying the feelings of students. Direct influence consists of feedback designed to state an instructor's own opinion or idea directed at a learner's action, criticizing a learner's behavior, or a teacher's use of authority. The following modified version of this coding form was given to each instructor.

**FIAC CODING - SESSION 1 or 2**

**DIRECT INFLUENCE**

1. Accept feelings ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____
2. Praise/encourage ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____
3. Use student ideas ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____
4. Ask questions ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____
5. Noncodable ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____

**INDIRECT INFLUENCE**

6. Lecturing ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____
7. Giving directions ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____
8. Criticizing ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____
9. Reprimand ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____
10. Noncodable ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____

## Results

Teachers listened to their tapes and were asked to place a check next to the category which matched their feedback mode. The instructors also circled the coding sheet as either assessment #1 or #2. The coding summary is as follows:

| CODE SESSION #1 | CODE SESSION #2 |
|---|---|
| **Indirect Influence** | **Indirect Influence** |
| 1. mean = 3 | 1. mean = 4 |
| 2. mean = 4 | 2. mean = 4 |
| 3. mean = 7 | 3. mean = 7 |
| 4. mean = 5 | 4. mean = 6 |
| 5 mean = 3 | 5. mean = 4 |
| **Direct Influence** | **Direct Influence** |
| 6. mean = 3 | 6. mean = 4 |
| 7. mean = 7 | 7. mean = 7 |
| 8. mean = 7 | 8. mean = 7 |
| 9. mean = 1 | 9. mean = 1 |
| 10. mean =2 | 10. mean = 3 |

There were no significant discrepancies between feedback "perceptions" between the novice and seasoned instructors. Moreover, with the exception of indirect influence numbers 1 & 4, and direct influence #1, there was not a considerable difference between both coding sessions.

The differences were seen with teacher subjects. The public speaking teachers perceived greater direct influence feedback than those teaching other areas. The oral interpretation teachers perceived greater indirect influence feedback. There was relatively good balance between both influence feedback modes among both the small group and voice and diction teachers, and the speech education teacher was responsible for all of the noncodable checks. At first glance numbers appear consistent with what speech communication college teachers ought to be doing in their performance-based classes. After all, a student in public speaking requires the type of guidance and criticism garnered by direct influence. For many of our colleagues in oral interpretation, literature, being somewhat more subjective than a designed piece of rhetoric, might require the "softer" feedback which is characteristic of indirect influence. When asking each teacher to respond to an open-ended form about their "self-correcting" behavior, helpful remarks, germane to further research were offered.

Two of the public speaking teachers commented on their excessive use of direct influence. Each felt that criticism, at times, was a bit harsh. As one teacher put it, "My criticism sounded like a reprimand and at one point I almost coded it as such." "The short lectures given (as one public speaking teacher contended) were unnecessary. I needed to ask more questions. " This teacher continued, "this inquiring mind wanted to know, but I was too busy telling students what I thought I knew."

Two of the voice and diction instructors desired to move toward greater direct feedback, and the third boldly asserted that the indirect influence mode was "the way to go." The small group teachers felt comfortable with their feedback modes. The instructor of speech education admitted a feeling of "paranoia"

about offering the correct type of feedback, "because I'm supposed to be a role model, of sorts, and I don't want to make any critical mistakes," he contended.

Each teacher discussed or at least referred to the importance of feedback in creating the appropriate climate, and in encouraging students to develop and progress in their speech performances. Only one instructor overtly discussed feedback as a mechanism by which students acquire a self-concept. And one instructor energetically submitted, "As a group of teachers who tout feedback, we know little about it and know how to appropriately implement it even less."

**Final Remark**

Studies of this nature clearly examine a limited universe. Still, some implications and ideas for further research can be found. The impact of perceived "teacher credibility" is an important variable. Vocal style, pedagogical "flavor," and overall context, to name just a few, are also variables that can affect overall feedback choices made by a teacher. Different learning "styles" require different feedback decisions and a feedback choice must mesh with a teacher's instructional "persona" in order for that choice to be effective.

But one thing seems certain to this teacher, that being, we must use feedback to accomplish our feats of instruction in what may be considered the most difficult and demanding area of teaching: oral communication performance. Nothing is more fragile than the human ego, and in a speech communication performance class the ego is constantly exposed. We humans can take criticism of our logical ability, our memory, and even our writing skills better than we can take direct criticism of our person as we present ourselves in a performance situation. And yet we, as a school of teachers, must find that unusual ability to deliver feedback on students' performances in a way that they find unthreatening, while still maintaining firm standards of performance. A study of feedback, as an instructional mechanism warrants considerable study. Back to basics? Perhaps. But feedback seems to be the staple which is the bedrock of our teaching success.